

THE FRIENDS OF THE I.W. LIBRARY SERVICE.

Final submission to the DCMS dated 20th Oct 2012.

This document has been prepared by the following members.

Serena

June

Dave

Names and addresses have been removed for privacy reasons

Basis of this submission

Three members of our group travelled to London and met with members of the DCMS staff , they listened to what we had to say and accepted a very large amount of documentary evidence as to the wishes and needs of the Isle of Wight residents and their concerns regarding the Council's intended changes to the Library Service on the Island. These concerns included the lack of co-operation by the IW Council and their apparent financial mismanagement in recent years.

It is a sad fact that since the present council came to power 7 years ago the £34.945 million reserve that they inherited has been squandered on numerous pointless expensive exercises, none of which ever came to fruition. The reserves were standing at £14.945 million (as at March 2011).

It would appear that although the governments Revenue Support Grant settlements have been well above the national average they have only managed to balance the budget by this huge withdrawal from the reserves. During the 2011/12 financial year despite the frequent comments from our Council leader, Cllr Pugh, that they needed to make drastic cuts in order to balance the books, they still managed to underspend by £2.3million. Most of this they appear to intend to use on projects that will buy them votes in next Mays council elections rather than use it to offset next years cut in the Revenue Support Grant.

The situation has been worsened by the following overspends

Adult social care	£4.061 million
Parking income shortfall	£1.030 million
Children's placements	£0.559 million
School transport	£0.592 million.

Since there has been a time lapse of almost 18 months and the changes put in place by the council as "cost cutting" came into effect in September 2011, this has given campaigners an opportunity to acquire information and statistics as to the effect this has had on the IW Library Service.

As the 1964 Public Libraries & Museums Act clearly states that there should be "a fully comprehensive and efficient library service". We feel that it is now up to the DCMS to fully analyse all of the information we have provided, past and present, to determine whether or not the implemented changes mean we have a Comprehensive and Efficient service and whether or not there has been a detrimental effect to our library service brought about by these changes

It is, in our opinion that the data we have collected to date has given us great cause for concern with regard to the future of the Library Service on the Isle of Wight. We do not feel confident that the library service has been improved by the Councils changes, rather the opposite in fact, as shown by the serious decline as evidenced by the statistics given in this submission.

The councils own Library opening hours listing as current now, shows that on every Thursday there are only two council run libraries open to serve a population of 110,000 electors plus all of those residents of 17 years or younger- this we feel is a very long way short of being an efficient and comprehensive service.

We have been told that the Secretary of State's view is that decisions about local issues should be taken by elected representatives who are accountable to local voters. We have to point out that this was never the case with the IW Council, at no time did they behave in a way that was accountable to local voters, in fact they showed a complete disregard to all those who wished for the library service to be saved in its original state, and to those of use who requested to engage in dialogue with the

council on how to save the required costs without closing any of the 11 libraries were continually and totally ignored, also included a number of those volunteering to run community libraries who believed that the IW Council were being deliberately obstructive. The cessation of council funding and the community takeovers were announced in the January consultation, the date being the end of March. This date was extended three times due to the pressure of the Judicial Review, solicitors letters etc. There were numerous letters and emails from campaigners and from the volunteer groups. This was a source of bad publicity for the council which they tried to negate by the use of deceit and half truths, evidence for all of this was presented to the Select Committee and we believe their report, publication of which has been delayed several times, will show just how much deception the Council used, not only to the DCMS, the Select Committee but also to their own electorate and this is probably why the report has not been published in time for its content to be used in these final submissions.

Were the changes beneficial to Islanders?

We had eleven libraries, the Council stated they only needed two, we now have six, the changes have meant four of the libraries now have reduced opening hours, there has been a drastic reduction in staffing levels, and in the two main libraries (Newport & Ryde) staff have been replaced by self service machines, this has not been an improvement in efficiency, in fact there has been a serious decline in user numbers, many people, particularly older users do not like the impersonal machines and as a result have ceased using the library altogether. The Council has a legal obligation to comply with the 1964 Act, for at least 18% of the Islands population there is no “comprehensive and efficient library service” available to them, many children, who are at school all week (used to have library visits every week) now have no access in East Cowes, the elderly and disabled in all five areas no longer funded by the council find it difficult, and in many cases impossible to access library services at all. The council have withdrawn subsidies for many of the rural bus routes making travel to the nearest library by public transport a matter of, in some cases, a return journey of anything up to 7 hours! All in all creating a serious reduction in the accessibility of library services to a significant proportion of the Island residents.

It has been commented on by many local people who still have access to their local library that the changes to procedures, opening hours and

staffing has had a detrimental effect on the atmosphere within the libraries. These comments have been made to various campaigners and were unsolicited. The 6 remaining libraries are small, by the standards of city libraries, many users had got to know their librarians personally, often on first name terms, following the dismissal of so many staff and the replacement of staff by machines, this has changed, many users now feel totally alienated from experienced library staff. These changes were made by the IW Council again with total disregard to the opinions and wishes of library users.

It might be worthwhile for the Secretary of State and the Minister to look at the submissions made to the select committee, in particular those submitted by Keith Fagan of Bembridge and by The Friends of Ventnor Library in particular (Ventnor was not one of the libraries closed by the council)

The Ventnor letter was published on the Islands on-line newspaper "On the Wight", it received a number of comments from readers and these can be read along with the original article at

<http://wig.ht/29mH>

Statistics.

The number of full time equivalent staff employed by the IW Library service in 2010-11 was 46.5 in 2011-12 this had been reduced to 21.6, a 55% reduction in staffing levels.

The number of visits received in 2010/11 by the five libraries that lost their funding was 154,805 and issues were 141,070. This appears to contradict the councils claim that these 5 libraries were only 18% of library use on the Island.

The number visits received by libraries in 2011-12 was 616,362, a reduction of 9% over 2010-11

The number of books issued in 2011-12 was 525,635, a reduction of 15% over the previous year.

The issue figures for the six remaining libraries over the period 2010 to Aug 2012 were as follows

	2010-11	2011-12
Freshwater	67,045	41,237
Cowes	61,795	37,589
Newport	213,413	158,645
Ryde	178,426	128,268
Sandown	76,444	51,079
Ventnor	47,697	31,224

As these figures show, the closure of five Council libraries did not give the Councils predicted increased use of the remaining six!

In 2011 12 self service machines were installed, six at Ryde and six at Newport, each terminal cost £8,035 making a total of £48,210 per library.

The IW library service cost were

2009-10 £1,759,009

2010-11 £1,811,896

2011-12 £1,454,681

Income figures as with visitor numbers and book issue figures have decreased, CIPF estimates a decrease from £119,352 to £103,897 in 2011/12, a 13% decrease.

An analysis of some of the other “library expenses” do not make too much sense, as the Isle of Wight council owns the library buildings, the pay business rates on the premises to themselves, last years was significant rises in the amounts they charged themselves! The figures given below, obtained under FOI raise questions as to why some of these figures are so high and why saving were not made on them

Figures for 2010-11 show that

Library HQ staff salaries	£98,512
Refuse collection charges	£27,682
Courier costs	£66,073
Telephones (landline)	£77,551
Transport costs	£49,064
Business Rates	
Newport Library	£32,495

Ryde Library	£13,338
Cowes Library	£6,063
Freshwater Library	£3,153
Sandown Library	£7,275
Ventnor Library	£5,335

And finally they list £30,000 for library computer software!

In the Library Review of 2010 the reasons given for ceasing funding/closing 9 of our 11 libraries were that “costs must be reduced” if this is the case we have to ask Why were the 5 libraries closed the 5 with the lowest costs? We feel that it may well have been because the 6 libraries that cost the most also held regular book sales, sold larger quantities of green refuse sacks and had access to a much larger range of cds/dvd.

Net costs by library for 2010 were

Newport,(Lord Louis)	£285,787
Ryde,	£207,408
Cowes,	£97,145
Sandown	£86,863
Freshwater	£73,395
Ventnor	£67,230
Bembridge,	£59,530
Shanklin	£56,754
East Cowes	£56,623
Brighstone	£28,425
Niton	£28,361

If you are trying to save money it seems odd that the 5 cheapest libraries were closed (several of these being in what the IW Council acknowledge as the most deprived areas of the Island) while similarly sized libraries, costing much more and in affluent areas of the Island were kept open.

The costs obviously show an overall reduction due to the cutbacks in branches and in staffing levels, however, had the IW council not grossly mismanaged its funds and had interacted with those who wished to preserve the library service, there would have been no need to made any of the cuts to libraries and other services slashed by the council, they were offered, from various sources, alternative budgets, numerous ideas

for saving money with resorting to slash and burn. The council and its leader were determined from the outset that they were going to close libraries, the so called consultation was totally flawed, and despite the short time available, there were 9000 signatures on petitions handed to the council, these were totally ignored.

When we came to the end of the financial year, our claim that the cuts were unnecessary were vindicated when the council announced a £2.3million pound underspend!

Conclusions.

There are compelling reasons why the DCMS should instigate a local enquiry, these include not only the evidence given above but also the fact that a very large number of IW library users were very unhappy with the evidence given by Cllr Pugh to the Select Committee, most of this was, at very best misinformation, again submissions were made to the Select Committee after Cllr Pugh's evidence was seen and heard on the Island, providing documentary evidence that he had been untruthful to the Select Committee.

The DCMS appears to be failing in its duty to uphold the 1964 Act, its failure to intervene places a serious risk on the delivery of an efficient and comprehensive library service on the Island, the reforms have already taken place so an intervention would not hold up any of the Councils plans, but it could stop any further decline in the service, their stated aim is to have only two libraries on the Island.

The Secretary of State does not wish to discuss the volunteer community libraries, he feels these are little used, we totally disagree, it is not always about numbers but about access to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups 18% of library users are made up of elderly, disabled, children, young mothers, these groups in almost half of the Isle of Wight are without a local library, they are isolated, lonely and the disregard of these groups is a breach of library policy and the 1964 Act. There have been leaks from within County Hall that it is still council policy to eventually have only two libraries, if the DCMS sit back and do nothing, this will be taken by the IW Council as government acceptance of their policies and that they have a free hand to do whatever they like without fear of retribution from Whitehall.

We need DCMS intervention to prevent the existing decline in the IW Library from getting any worse, the council should be forced to interact with library users to find out how users want their library service to be

run, not only now but for the future, after all, it is the users who pay for the library service via their council tax and not the councillors who are supposed to represent us.

ENDS